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INFO RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 6872

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RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 7468

RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 0539

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2418

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2183

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SUBJECT: TOKYO MEDIA REACTION - TIBET

¶11. LEAD STORIES: Top items on Wednesday morning include the growing likelihood that gas prices will drop in April, as it has now become certain that parliamentary deliberations on the GOJ's omnibus tax bill, which includes an extension of provisional gasoline surcharges for road construction, will be delayed into April.

¶12. "Dialogue Rather than Strong-Armed Policy" The conservative Sankei editorialized (3/26): "The Beijing Olympic Committee is reportedly asking governments that will host the Olympic torch relay that they prevent not just direct obstruction of the event and related ceremonies but also prevent such activities as hoisting banners bearing anti-Chinese messages. Preventing violent protests is a matter of course. However, respect for freedom of expression, including opposition to the Olympics, is also regarded as a principle of any democratic state.... Dialogue between the Chinese government and the Tibetan government in exile is the only way to cast off the dark clouds hanging over the Beijing Olympics."

¶13. "China Concerned about Its Image" The liberal Mainichi's Beijing correspondent wrote (3/26): "Demonstrations at the torch lighting ceremony in Greece reminded China of the worldwide reverberations of the situation in Tibet. If more demonstrations occur around the world in the course of the four-month torch relay, there is a possibility that the Olympics' image would be damaged, as the torch would turn from a symbol of peace to a symbol of constraints on human rights."

SCHIEFFER